

State Duma Could Pass Unprecedented Measure Against Underage Prostitution

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Among a series of proposed reforms increasing penalties for sexual crimes, the State Duma intends to introduce a law that, for the first time in Russian history, would outlaw the hiring of underage prostitutes.

"Previously there was [criminal] responsibility if a prostitute hadn't turned 16. Meanwhile, according to international conventions, individuals who haven't turned 18 are considered underage. Now this circumstance will be taken into account in our code too," said Viktor Pensky, first deputy chairman of the State Duma committee on legislation, Interfax reported Thursday.

The bill passed its second reading on Sept. 20. In its current form, the law punishes hiring prostitutes between the ages of 16 and 18 with, at the most, up to four years imprisonment or compulsory labor, Itar-Tass reported.

Engaging in sexual relations with children under the age of 16 is already punishable by up to four years of imprisonment. Penalties increase with the youth of the victim and in cases where same-sex relations are involved.

Some Duma deputies are concerned that the new law could be used to deliberately frame people who are unaware of a prostitute's actual age.

Nonetheless the final bill disregards a client's knowledge of a prostitute's age. "If the person didn't know, this doesn't free him from responsibility. If you use a prostitute's services — check their passport," Pensky said.

Although prostitution is illegal in Russia, penalties for those convicted of working as prostitutes are minimal — from 1,500 rubles to 2,000 rubles (\$50 to \$60).

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